

Chapter 5



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Rototilling to prepare northern red-bellied cooter habitat

Planning to Protect Land and Resources

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Introduction

This chapter describes how we engaged others in developing this draft CCP/EA. In chronological order it details our efforts to encourage the involvement of the public and conservation partners, including other Federal and State agencies, county officials, civic groups, non-government conservation education organizations, and user groups. It also identifies who contributed to the writing of the plan.

This chapter does not detail the dozens of informal discussions the refuge staff have had over the last six years where the CCP was a topic of conversation. Those discussions involved a wide range of audiences, including congressional representatives or their staffs, local community leaders and other residents, refuge neighbors, refuge visitors, and other interested individuals. During those discussions, the refuge manager and staff often provided an update on our progress and encouraged comments and other participation.

A 60-day period for public review follows our release of this draft CCP/EA. We encourage all to respond with ideas about the plan. During that period, we will host open public meetings at locations near the refuge to gather comments and answer questions about our draft proposals. We will consider these responses carefully before we write the final CCP.

According to Service policy, we must review and update our final CCP at least once every 15 years, or sooner in response to important new information that would markedly change management direction, or when our Regional Director deems it necessary. If so, we will once again announce our revised planning and encourage your participation.

Planning to Protect Land and Resources

Our refuge planning began in 1999 when we initiated a CCP that would encompass all of the refuges in the Refuge Complex. We published an NOI in the *Federal Register* and began public scoping. By 2001, we determined that writing a plan for eight refuges was too cumbersome and instead focused on CCPs for the other refuges in the complex. The efforts in CCP completion for Massasoit NWR were halted at that time.

In 2011, we resumed our refuge planning for Massasoit NWR with an NOI published in the *Federal Register* on January 10, 2012. The planning process began informally in November 2011 at an initial strategy meeting between the refuge staff and the consultants. One major outcome of that first meeting was a timetable for accomplishing the major steps in the planning process and determining when and how we should involve others.

January 2012: Letters were sent to invite representatives from the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), Department of Conservation and Recreation and MSSF, NHESP, and MassWildlife to participate on the planning team. Invitations to participate on the planning team were also extended to Service staff from the Division of Migratory Birds and Ecological Services.

March 2, 2012: The pre-planning team, consisting of refuge and Regional Service staff, met at the complex headquarters in Sudbury, Massachusetts, to draft a preliminary vision statement and goals, identify issues and concerns, determine what additional resource information was needed to be collected and summarized, and discussed what other experts should be consulted to help address planning issues. We also scheduled our partner and public scoping meetings.

March 2, 2012: The core planning team, consisting of refuge staff, Regional staff from the Service's Ecological Services, MassWildlife, NHESP, and the Service's Coastal Program met to finalize the draft vision statement and goals to present to the public.

April 2012: We distributed a 1-page newsletter to approximately 90 people, organizations, and agencies to formally announce the beginning of the planning process and the upcoming public meeting, and sent out press releases to the local media to announce the public meeting. Invitation letters were sent to 15 people representing 20 local, State, and national agencies and organizations of potential interest to the upcoming public scoping meeting on April 9, 2012.

April 9, 2012: We hosted both the stakeholders and public meetings at Plymouth Library, having published notices in local newspapers, the newsletter, and partner's Websites. Nine people representing seven organizations were in attendance at the stakeholder meeting, and nine people signed in at the public meeting.

At each meeting the draft vision, goals, and objectives were posted, as well as the preliminary issues identified by the core planning team. A summary of the planning process was presented, and attendees were encouraged to provide feedback on any of the presented items, or general concerns and issues they had about the refuge. Comment forms were provided and staff recorded comments on flip charts. Members of the public were notified that there was an open comment period with no closing date.

June 4, 2012: The core planning team met again at the Refuge Complex headquarters in Sudbury, Massachusetts, to identify key issues and develop the strategies and alternatives for the document. Tom French from NHESP was in attendance along with Service staff.

August 8, 2012: The core planning team met at the Refuge Complex headquarters in Sudbury, Massachusetts, to review the alternative matrix.

June 26, 2012 & September 27, 2012: The Service staff met with town of Plymouth Board Member, Malcolm MacGregor, to walk through the refuge and abutting northern property to review the town's concept of potential trails to connect MSSF through the refuge as part of a larger regional trail connection system. Staff discussed potential issues regarding impacts to wildlife, costs, and feasibility of potential trails. No decision was determined at this gathering.

November 5, 2012: The core planning team met at the Refuge Complex headquarters in Sudbury, Massachusetts, to update the alternative matrix and finalize the public use options for the refuge including potential trail openings and hunting on the currently closed refuge. Tom French from NHESP program was present in addition to Service staff.

June 2012 to May 2016. Developed the first six chapters, acronyms/glossary, bibliography, and eight appendices of the CCP and prepared them for internal review.

Partners Involved in Refuge Planning

Refuge programs enjoy a great deal of support from outside the Service in many areas: conducting biological surveys, enhancing public use and refuge programs, restoring habitat, and protecting land. Our partnerships will continue to expand with the increasing interest in conserving refuge resources. During the past year, we contacted the following organizations to apprise them of the planning process and encourage their involvement.

Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife):

Jason Zimmer, Steve Hurley

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation:

Dave Celino, District Fire Chief

Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program:
Dr. Thomas French, Assistant Director

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